Addressing the Social Nature of How Students Learn and Teachers Teach: Promoting Healthy Socioemotional Development and Academic Success in the Classroom

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This report will illustrate the positive and negative aspects of the social nature of learning through a review of sociocultural related research. In consideration of the billion dollar issues associated with the current state of students' mental health, and the poor educational experiences of low income students, it seems the current focus on academic achievement in isolation, isn't working. Socioemotional elements underlie the cognitive processes involved in all higher levels of thinking and problems solving. From a sociocultural perspective, for optimal learning to occur, teachers and students must establish positive affective relationships. Through greater understanding of effective teaching practices that consider the socioemotional elements involved learning, and universal interventions promoting positive child and youth development, schools can promote children's social and emotional wellbeing while simultaneously improving academic achievement.

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Chapter 1: Educating the Whole Child; Not just the Academic Part

In this report I will argue that the social and emotional wellbeing of children has not gotten the attention it needs. I will begin by talking about the current state of education and the under recognized problem of children's mental health. I will then review research and programs that may be helpful in addressing this problem.

State of the Current Education System

As of 2008, a record 49.8 million students and $519 billion in expenditures are projected for public elementary and secondary schools in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). We are spending more money on education then ever before on a system that places a strong emphasis on high stakes testing and school and teacher accountability for achievement at the national, stated and local levels. Holding teachers accountable is a reasonable and necessary action to take, but the way the current system is organized, a teacher is only as good as his or her students' test scores. The notion that performance on one test is a measure of teaching effectiveness or ineffectiveness is questionable and impractical. In fact, according to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHED) the current methods used to evaluate teacher and classroom quality are known to be unrelated to quality teaching practices (NICHED, 2005).

Failing test scores and achievement gaps are not all that surprising if one considers that one in five young people has at least one diagnosable mental or addictive disorder considered to be a treatable condition (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001, as cited in Tolan & Dodge, 2005), or that one in ten adolescents is

estimated to have a mental health disorder (U.S. Public Health Service, 2000, as cited in Tolan & Dodge, 2005). These numbers are staggering, as are the findings showing only 31% of nonminority children, and 13% of minority children, are estimated to receive services for mental health conditions (Ringel & Sturm, 2001).

The consequences of untreated mental or addictive disorders for young people can include: poor academic performance, discrimination by peers, placement in special education, dropping out of school, and juvenile detention (Tolan & Dodge, 2005). All of which result in billions in government spending. Consider the money we spend on incarcerating young people who have gone untreated for their mental illness. On any given day, 50-75% of all youth in juvenile detention centers have at least one diagnosable mental disorder (Tolan & Dodge, 2005). In addition, the physical health problems that develop as a result of untreated mental health disorders reach almost 3 billion dollars a year (Tolan & Doyle, 2005). We spend $85.4 billion per year on mental health care; only $11.7 billion is spent on persons under age 21; and the amount spent on prevention (Tolan & Dodge, 2005)? Tolan and Dodge (2005) reported the U.S. government spends $0 on mental illness prevention.

Promotion of Mental Health in Schools

Tolan and Dodge (2005) proposed that one way to address the current children's mental health crisis is the promotion of mental health itself and good child development through schools and teachers. Like vaccinations or fluoride in the water, Tolan and Dodge (2005) contended universal interventions are needed in schools. The researchers explained that there are numerous factors contributing to the poor outcome for many

children and adolescents with a diagnosable mental health disorder, but cognitive limitations in the ability to manage social relationships and inner problem solving skills are a major contributor to many of the problems these children and adolescents experience in school. The universal interventions Tolan and Dodge (2005) proposed include social development approaches that focus on positive choices, decision making, bonding to school, choices related to not engaging in risky behavior, increasing problem solving skills and related work.

Social skills programs administered on the universal level focus on the development of problem solving skills in social relationships (i.e., what to do in peer pressure situations) and often involve training and rehearsing skills in a variety of situations. Anger management programs (e.g., “Coping Power”) are another type of universal intervention Tolan and Dodge (2005) proposed as being of great necessity. The researchers explained that anger management programs teach kids about healthy ways to deal with their feelings, mediate their reactions, and decide what to do. Essentially, they teach the connection between thoughts, feelings, and actions. Additionally, they teach students skills to promote positive ways of thinking, and teach them how to identify, express, and regulate emotions. These programs also teach skills as to how children can keep themselves from getting into such situations in the first place so that they are less likely to have strong reactions to daily social situations.

In order to implement such programs effectively, Tolan and Dodge (2005) explained that structured, directive, goal-oriented programs work better. Addressing children’s mental health in schools is not as general as simply asking students how they

feel. The researchers contended that it is important that teachers focus on developing skills and addressing problem solving as they are related to specific problems. The personal and technical skills of the teacher implementing the program are also key elements to success. Tolan and Dodge (2005) contend that teachers need to be properly trained in technical skills (i.e., how to intervene in student conflict), but most importantly, they must understand the importance of the interpersonal relationship between students and teachers and be able to project warmth and empathy to their students.

In addition to the promotion of mental health and good child development based practices through teachers and schools, Tolan and Dodge (2005) proposed that the second element needed to address the problem of children's mental health effectively, is the need for opportunity for education and support around mental health issues. The third involves decreasing the isolation of many parents who are raising children without the help of extended family and or friends, often parenting without and advice or support from others. The final component proposed as necessary for the establishment of an effective mental health system is the need for early intervention for those at risk. Tolan and Dodge (2005) argued that one of these missing resources for most approaches is that little is known in regards to how they work, and the researchers referred to this as the "black box problem." Understanding why many mental health interventions work is a problem I will attempt to shed some light on throughout this report.

What currently is being done to address the billion dollar issues associated with children's mental health, and the poor educational experiences of low income students seems not to be working. What is being focused on is academic achievement. What is not

being addressed is the socioemotional nature of learning. What happens when socioemotional aspects of development are addressed in the classroom? Here is an example of my first exposure to the use of social and emotional education in the classroom.

An Example of Teacher Led Social and Emotional Education

After my first semester of graduate school, I was itching to get in a classroom. I spent the first few months working as an assistant teacher in a pre-kindergarten classroom. There, I worked with a teacher who was truly a teaching expert. She had established close relationships with all her students before the school year even began. She visited each child at his or home, again at school, and then she met privately with their parents. She met with me before the first day of class and told me about each child and the importance of learning about each student. She was already discussing possible social dynamics that could pose a problem so that I could also try to prevent anything unpleasant, and ones that would be beneficial to how we wanted the children's experience in the classroom to unfold.

What surprised me most about my first classroom teaching experience was the teacher's focus on problem solving, emotions, and social skills from the very first day. You knock a friend over by accident, what do you do? Hit a friend on purpose? What do you, and what can you do next time instead? I, on the other hand, was very concerned about the range of abilities in the classroom in terms of letter and sound recognition, fine motor skills, and beginning math. We have to make sure these children are ready for kindergarten! What she did not explicitly explain to me, but what I grew to understand, is

that children cannot achieve academically without learning to get along with their peers and manage their emotions. Once positive social relationships were established, and the children learned to properly regulate their emotions, I saw them not only improve but, take off academically.

I asked this teacher before the first day of school “What is the most important thing we need to teach our students?” She replied without hesitation, “To ask questions. If they learn to ask questions, they will never stop learning.” Every lesson she taught began with a question. When she read stories, she stopped and asked the children what words meant, why characters did certain things, and how clues could be found in the pictures to answer her questions. She would prompt the students to think about other things they knew that were similar to what we were discussing. They learned to solve all sorts of problems, including getting along with each other and working in groups. She recognized the value in collaborative learning. She would find ways for the students to teach each other. She would pair children in different learning situations based on what she knew of each individual student’s strengths and areas that needed improvement. IN doing so she taught her class that they could learn from each other, and about the benefits of working as a group.

By the end of the year, the entire class was reading at least at kindergarten level. More importantly, I noticed by the third month that the students were happy, thriving, and inquisitive. With the guidance of an effective and nurturing teacher, these students had developed a genuine love for school, and a love for learning.

In this report I will discuss how what I have learned through research has made me further appreciate what I saw in this classroom. I will address how through effective teaching practices that consider the socioemotional elements of learning, schools can address the concerns of children's mental health while simultaneously improving academic achievement.

This report will be presented in three parts. In Chapter 2 I will provide a discussion of the social nature of learning and how it has both positive and negative aspects; Chapter 3 is comprised of research addressing socioemotional elements known to improve the student learning experience; finally, in Part 4, I will discuss implications for theoretical understanding and conclude with suggestions for teacher education.

Chapter 2: The Social Nature of Learning

In this chapter I will discuss Sociocultural theory and the works of Vygotsky, followed by research illustrating the consequences of what happens when socioemotional components of learning are ignored. I will end the chapter with a look at the importance of establishing caring relationships between student and teachers to facilitate optimal learning and overall student wellbeing.

Vygotsky's Legacy

Whether in preschool or 12th grade, every day students go to school they are learning from what they observe, what they thinks about, and how they behave. A social-constructivist approach to learning is one that involves linking social interaction and psychological activity, and emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs around every human individual.

Vygostsky (1978), the acknowledged founder of this perspective, wrote extensively about the social nature of learning and how cultural and historical factors influence the meaning making process. These ideas were once considered quite radical, but by the late 1980s, educators and educational researchers began to discuss individual cognition as something that occurs not solely within a person, but within a person who is creating meaning amidst a matrix of social, cultural, and historical influences.

Sociocultural theory draws from Vygotsky's (1978) tripartite model of cultural development. This theory contends that the development of personality, cultural emotions, and behavioral mastery occurs in the context of historically and culturally established practices (Levykh, 2007). Vygotsky described that only by considering the

social world within which a person develops, can we understand his or her individual characteristics (Panofsky, 2003).

According to Levykh (2007), Vygotsky held a dialectical approach to development that opposed traditional Western educational views. A dialectical approach allows for the mediation of the learning process in ways that assist natural development. In this respect, development "is not a direct and natural process, but rather indirect, artificial, mediated (governed) by cultural laws of teaching-learning[1]" (Levykh, 2007, p. 89). Vygotsky (1978) explained cultural development as appearing on two planes: first on the social plane between people (interpsychological), and then on the psychological plane (within the individual).

Levykh (2007) contended that Vygotsky is most well known in the West for his contribution of the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD refers to the space between what a learner can currently do independently and what he or she potentially will be able to do in the future. The nature of this space is determined by what the student can accomplish with the help of a more knowledgeable teacher or peer. What a child is capable of achieving with assistance is internalized as something he or she achieved independently. In this way, assisted learning advances the development of higher mental functions.

[1] According to Levykh (2007) "if we examine the word "kul'tura" (culture) in the Russian language, we find that it signifies the sum total of achievements in an industrial, social and intellectual sense. It also refers to the highest level of something- in particular, development, a specific ability (physical culture, the culture of speech), education, and upbringing" (p. 95).

A frequently overlooked aspect associated with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is his claim that the effectiveness of the zone of proximal development is dependent upon the culturally developed emotions of the student and teacher. The nature of the ZPD is fluid and sensitive to changes in emotion. Teachers must be flexible and emotionally perceptive regarding the ever-changing nature of the learning and development that occurs within the ZPD. Levykh (2007) claimed that emotions were central to Vygotsky's notion of cultural development and that "the individual emotional experience (being part of personality) seems to be foundational to (consciously, subconsciously and unconsciously) the person's perception, attention, memory, decision making, behavioral mastery, and overall world orientation" and such individual emotions are formed within the context of the group (Levykh, 2007, p. 84). According to Levykh (2007) "the dynamic process of establishing and maintaining the ZPD is successful only when emotionally laden reciprocal relations between the learner and the instructor allow for participants' comfort and trust, which are manifested in constant negotiation of the subject of inquiry and the way it is presented and acquired" (p. 97).

Research Showing Social Effects in Schools

In a review of sociocultural research in schools, Panofsky (2003) proposed that past research has involved the mediation of tools, signs and symbols (semiosis), using social interaction as the "unit of analysis", but that few have examined the process of mediating social interactions, or "the dynamics of power, position, social location in the social interaction of learning" (p. 411). She claimed that there has been a lack of emphasis and research investigating schools as social systems that contribute to the

formation of personality and psychology, and argued that this is despite the fact that research has shown social relation dynamics as a central element involved in the school success of low income learners. According to Panofsky (2003), “ideally, the perspective of sociocultural theory is able to integrate levels of analysis from the macrolevels of culture to the microlevels of social interaction and individual thinking and speech” (p. 19).

Panofsky (2003) turns to the writing of Bourdieu (1977) to guide her analysis of past research involving the issue of social class in schools. According to Panofsky (2003), Bourdieu believed that social classes do not exist, but it is within a social space that relational conceptions of class develop. Panofsky contended that the importance of Bourdieu’s (1977) perspective in the analysis of school culture relies heavily on the dominant lifestyle that emerges creating a “logic of symbolic violence” according to which dominated life styles are almost always perceived, even by those who live them, from the destructive and reductive point of view of the dominant aesthetic” (Bourdieu, 1977, as cited in Panofsky, p. 417).

Panofsky (2003) made her points by reviewing the results of three studies. The first study involves a poignant example of how student social class can influence teacher expectations, and how negative biases affect the student experience. This study involved all black students and staff in an “urban ghetto school” (Rist, 1970/2000, p. 271). Kindergarten children were placed in three reading groups based on the teacher’s evaluation of “ability” which was established during the first eight days of school. With the exception of these eight school days, the only information the teacher had available to

make such ability assessments came from registration forms filled out by the child's parents, a social worker with knowledge of whether a child's family received assistance, and other teachers' reports of prior sibling behavior.

Before children were placed into "ability" groups, differential treatment of certain students had already clearly emerged. These children were identifiably different from the other two groups; they had newer and cleaner clothes and spoke in a dialect of English that most closely matched the teacher's middle-class standard. When children were placed in reading ability groups, the groupings were reflective of the differential treatment observed in the first week of school.

Children placed in the "high-group" sat at Table 1. These students were the closest to the chalkboard and the teacher's desk. Students at Table 1 received more positive teacher attention and greater access to learning opportunities than did the other two. The children at Table 1 mistreated the students at Tables 2 and 3 both physically and verbally. The students at the lower tables also engaged in mistreatment of peers in similar ways, but their taunting and bullying never included the children at Table 1. From the teacher's "normative reference group," a social hierarchy emerged facilitated by teacher bias. The students at Table 1 were those most similar to the teacher's middle class status, and students at Table 3 were those who were the farthest from her own socioeconomic background. When Rist (1970/200) again observed the students two and three years later, table placement appeared to be predictive of the value students placed on the school experience, and the children who had been placed at Tables 2 and 3 in kindergarten were shown to exhibit resistance and apathy to school in second and third grade.

One might hope the relevance of this particular study would diminish with time but Rist's (1970/2000) findings have been replicated and expanded upon, revealing more dimensions of differentiation in student treatment based on social class (Panofsky, 2003). Wilcox (1988) observed two first grade classrooms in the same district: one in an upper-middle-class (UMC) neighborhood and one in a lower-middle-class (LMC) neighborhood. Almost all students and staff were white. Like in Rist's (1970/2000) study, Wilcox (1988) found teachers used more controlling language towards children of lower social classes. However, Wilcox (1988) also discovered qualitative differences. She identified two types of discourse language teachers used with students: "external control" or "internal control" language.

Teachers' use of internal and external strategies and controlling statements were shown to differ drastically between the two classrooms examined. Internal control language emphasizes student responsibility (i.e., "are you sure that goofing off is a good choice right now if you want to improve your math skills?), whereas external control language is directed at the student (i.e., "you need to sit down and get to work"). Wilcox (1988) observed that teachers in the upper middle class classroom used internal strategies 39% of the time and internal messages 59% of the time when communicating with their students.

In drastic contrast, in lower middle class classrooms, teachers used internal control language promoting responsibility and choice only 9% of the time when discussing strategies, and only 10% of the time when delivering verbal messages. In both classrooms, children in the top half of the reading groups were recipients of significantly

more internal messages than peers considered lower ability. In addition, comments of future expectations differed in relation to student social class.

In the upper middle class classroom, the teacher often commented on the children's future (eight times more than in the LMC classroom) and the expectation of college. The teacher in the lower middle class classroom never mentioned college to her young students. Children in the UMC classroom were given more chances to learn self-presentation skills and received more help when they struggled in learning. If a student had an identified learning problem in the UMC classroom, the child was given multiple forms of assistance until the problem was considered solved. In the LMC classroom, learning problems were not addressed. Wilcox (1988) reported that these students did not receive any assistance because such problems were considered the norm.

Wilcox's (1988) analysis revealed differential treatment of the observed students was in no way responsive to student behavior and was initiated by the teachers. Wilcox (1988) explained "interviews with teachers themselves made it clear that they felt they were allowing and encouraging each child to develop and progress as far as each was able; they would have been shocked at any accusation of differential treatment based on social class" (Wilcox, 1988, as cited in Panofsky, p. 421). In fact, upon further analysis of schools at the district level, the researcher found that UMC districts readily gave out test scores while LMC districts did not because of parent complaints. She explained, "a high-level district official said with considerable indignation that the scores were a direct consequence of the average IQ and socioeconomic level of the neighborhood" (Wilcox, 1988, as cited in Panofsky, p. 422).

The findings of Wilcox's (1988) research illustrates the impact a student's social class can have on his or her lived school experience, and shows how easily a child's background dictates what teachers expect the child to be capable of achieving. Panofsky (2003) contended the use of internal and external language used in the two classrooms provides an example of how specific cultural values and activities influence the development of differences in psychology (specifically motivation). This study provides insight into the failure of many educational reforms and Wilcox (1988) argued:

> "The research findings suggests that many popular education reforms are likely simply to rearrange the appearance of classroom interaction leaving the substance of what takes place in the classroom largely untouched. This is because the reforms are conceptualized and introduced with little understanding of the powerful cultural influences at work in the classroom" (Wilcox, 1988, as cited in Panofsky, 2003, p. 422).

Reforms efforts often ignore mediating elements that affect what is taught and what is learned in the classroom, and this is the topic of the final piece of research in Panofsky's (2003) review, one that illustrates how differential treatment can extend to the implementation of curriculum. Two reading groups were examined in Collin's (1986) investigation of reading instruction in first grade classrooms. The highest ability group, and the lowest ability group were homogeneous in terms of ethnic group and social class. The high group consisted of all children from white professional families, and the low group membership was comprised of children from black working class-families.

Collins (1986) revealed teacher communication of the same curriculum based instruction led to different notions of what is considered "reading" by the two groups of students, as well as differential teacher responses to identical student errors. The type of correction a student received was shown to be dependent on his or her relative position within the social space of the classroom. Children in the high ability group received corrections that focused on comprehension, whereas errors made by students in the low ability group were addressed with decoding focused corrections" (as cited in Panofsky, 2003).

The differential instruction and corrections received by children within one classroom, and in light of the same curriculum, provides further evidence of how greatly the experience of one child can differ from that of another under what appear to be similar circumstances. Panofsky (2003) provided examples as to how the social nature of learning can lead to poor learning experiences for students when the element that mediates social and academic outcomes in the classroom, social interactions, is not taken into consideration.

Panofsky (2003) illustrated how heavily teachers' thoughts and behaviors influence the social, psychological, and intellectual development of their students. Her review serves the education community by bringing awareness to the under-discussed issue of the ways in which teachers interact with their students and what beliefs are known to bias those interactions. Not until biases are recognized can teachers put forth the effort to actively try to change their perceptions of learners and improve relationships

within the classroom. In addition to social class, the interaction of SES and gender is also known to bias teacher beliefs and behaviors.

A recent study by Auwarter and Aruguete (2008) investigated the possibility that teacher perceptions of student gender and socioeconomic status may be a causal link between such student characteristics and academic outcomes. In this study, 106 teachers were instructed to read a paragraph about a student with seeming academic and behavioral difficulties. The student's gender and SES were manipulated to form four experimental conditions: (a) low-SES girl, (b) high-SES girl, (c) low-SES boy, and (d) high-SES boy. Teachers were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions, and each was given the following paragraph to read with only the information in the parentheses varying dependent on the four experimental conditions:

> (Mark, Mary) is a Missouri public school student. (He, She) lives with both parents and is the middle child in the family. (His, Her) mother (is a physician, cleans rooms in a local motel) and (his, her) father is (an attorney, currently unemployed). (He, She) has an average IQ but is earning poor grades and failing in math. (He,She) has not been turning in (his, her) homework in several subjects and does not use (his, her) time efficiently in class. (Mark, Mary) used to have a positive attitude about school, earned good grades, and was well liked by (his, her) teachers. Recently, (he, she) has become withdrawn and has begun to receive a number of behavioral referrals. For example (he, she) has become aggressive with (his, her) peers by getting into both verbal and physical fights at least once a

week. (His, Her) parents have met with the teacher and school counselor on a few occasions, but the situation has not improved.

After reading the paragraph teachers were instructed to fill out a questionnaire answering as if they were the teacher of the student described. The teachers answered questions regarding future expectations for the student, need for academic support services, personal characteristics, believability (e.g., "Students often behave like the student in the scenario"), and SES (a single item scored on a 7-point scale of wealthy to poor). As found in previous research (e.g., Hamilton, Sherman, & Ruvolo, 1990; Jussim, 1986; Rist, 1970), children from higher SES backgrounds were judged more favorably than identical students portrayed as having low SES.

Gender was found only to affect teacher evaluation in the interaction with SES. The low-SES female student was rated more favorably than the high-SES female student. The inverse was found for boys with the high-SES male student being rated more favorably than the low-SES male student. This finding supports previous research regarding initial teacher perceptions as being more positive towards low-SES girls and more negative towards low-SES boys (e.g. Childs & McKay, 2001) and also suggests that the effects of gender may be over generalized when studied in isolation.

Cultural movement styles, or the way people move, walk, and hold their bodies, have also been found to bias teacher perceptions of achievement ability. Neal, Mccray, Webb-Johnson, and Bridgest (2003) revealed teacher biases based on African American cultural movement styles. Neal et al. (2003) showed that black students with culture-related movement styles were perceived as higher in aggression, lower in achievement

ability, and as more likely to need special education services than black students considered to have standard movement styles. This study revealed that students' cultural differences may be mistaken for cognitive or behavioral difficulties by teachers. This could contribute to previous findings that African American boys are thought to be especially vulnerable to placement in special education programs, inappropriate discipline, poor schooling and underachievement (e.g., Patton, 1998).

It is evident that how teachers think about their students matters. We have seen what can happen when educators hold biased negative views and do not address the socioemotional components of learning: they can lead to negative student teacher relationships, poor peer relationships, poor academic outcomes, negative associations with school, and behavior problems (Panofsky, 2003). From a sociocultural perspective, for optimal learning to occur, teachers must establish positive affective relationships to strengthen the connection between the information presented, and the knowledge constructed in the mind of the learner (Goldstein, 1999).

Influence of the Teacher-Student Relationship

Many researchers have argued that teacher quality is the most accurate indicator and predictor of a student's achievement (e.g., Brown, 2002; Carter, 2001; Delpit,1995; Haberman,1995, 2005; Kopetz et al.,2006; Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings,1994; Sanders & Rivers,1996; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004). A quality teacher is effective, and research shows that effective teachers focus on teaching to children's strengths (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2006). When teachers form relationships with their students, they can gradually discover the nature of those strengths by creating more opportunities for

positive interactions, within which students can reveal their unique talents, strengths, passions, comforts, and abilities that could not be known otherwise.

The value of forming personal relationships lies not only in the knowledge the teacher gains about that particular student, but also in that student's willingness to accept a teacher as a person who can guide him or her through the learning process; a student's perception of a teacher as caring, attentive to student needs, and encouraging of input from the student enhances the students drive to learn and to achieve more in the classroom (McCombs, 2003). Additionally, feelings of relatedness to one's teacher have been shown to benefit both behavioral and emotional engagement in students in third through sixth grade (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

Vygotsky (1978) placed emphasis on the importance of the relationship between the learner and the teacher, specifically this relationship as it relates to the Zone of Proximal Development. The more knowledgeable other helps the learner through six different types of scaffolding functions: recruiting the learner's interest, simplifying the task, highlighting its relevant features, maintaining motivation, controlling learner frustration, and modeling. Arguing that learning is a process of internalizing, Vygotsky (1978) stated that only when a learner is ready and focused can he or she benefit from the support provided by the more knowledgeable other (Levykh, 2007).

The social dynamics of the classroom are correlated with how teachers treat their students (Panofsky, 2003). When positive interpersonal relationships are established with students, teachers treat students with respect and kindness. Through behavioral modeling, teachers can guide their students to learn to treat themselves, and their peers, with

respect, and assist in the development of a safe, comfortable, positive learning environment.

Teachers' beliefs about students affect how they structure lessons, choose activities used in the classroom, and how they interact with students, and these behaviors influence student achievement (Muijs & Reynolds, 2002). Forming a close relationship may improve the accuracy of a teacher's impression of student ability; and this is essential to ensuring that a child engages in his or her Zone of Proximal Development (Panofsky, 2003). The better a teacher knows a student, the more information he or she will have to work with to inform instructional practices and guide daily interactions in ways that maximize student learning and achievement, and the student experience within the classroom.

In conclusion, from a sociocultural perspective, the establishment of a positive relationship between teachers and students is the most crucial element of successful learning. As shown in the discussed research, what students learn is not determined by the content of instructional material, but the socioemotional factors involved in its presentation. In the next chapter, I will review literature that specifically addresses socioemotional elements in learning.

Chapter 3: Socioemotional Research and Academic Achievement

The promotion of positive child and youth development via our schools and teachers is gaining recent attention, but many continue to focus on the importance of academic achievement. The following studies presented in this chapter provide evidence that can be used to address both concerns simultaneously. The first section looks at ways teachers can specifically promote help seeking behaviors through a discussion of goal orientation, intelligence beliefs, and attributions. The second section concerns research in motivation, emotions, socioemotional education through schools, and student perceptions of teacher practices.

Research and Interventions Aimed at Help Seeking

Students who do not actively seek help in the classroom are at an academic disadvantage, and research shows that students must be able to recognize when they need help, and then be motivated to ask for it (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Ryan & Pintrich (1997) explained that deciding whether or not to seek help is filtered through a combined motivational and affective system. Both those who actively seek help, and actively avoid help, are influenced by personal goal orientation and perceived classroom goal orientations, social goals, sociocultural variables, student perceptions of their teachers as approachable, and views of intelligence (Shih, 2008). We will begin by discussing how students' goal orientations affect learning and why mastery goals encourage help seeking behaviors.

Goal orientation. Goal orientations provide a framework for interpreting and reacting to events. A mastery goal approach is one where a learner values understanding

and learning. A mastery goal orientation is consonant with the belief that "you can learn more from your failures than your successes." When mastery learning is encouraged, value is placed on the process and depth of learning, not just the outcome of performance.

According to Linnenbrink (2005) a mastery goal perspective is thought to be beneficial for all students across socioemotional, cognitive, and achievement conditions. This approach acknowledges that performance goals, especially performance approach goals, may be adaptive for some outcomes (e.g., cognitive engagement). However, Linnenbrink (2005) argued that overall, a performance orientation is maladaptive in consideration of the whole child. She also asserted that the reason research has not consistently shown the superiority of this approach is due to the way achievement is tested.

Linnenbrink's (2005) research revealed that a student's personal goal orientation is highly influenced by the classroom environment. This study also showed the positive effects associated with mastery classroom goal orientation include many benefits to students: higher self-efficacy, interest, utility, positive affect, and lower, negative affect, test anxiety, and adaptive help seeking.

Linnenbrink (2005) pointed to eight areas involved in a mastery oriented context and advised teachers to make use of them through: the use of varied and authentic tasks in the classroom, emphasizing student autonomy, recognizing students for improvement and learning, making use of small heterogeneous groups to facilitate learning, basing evaluation on preset criteria or improvement, allowing for flexible timing; and promoting group over individual competition, structured around relative improvement between

groups, rather than relative performance. In addition to creating mastery oriented classrooms, research suggests teachers may also have the ability to influence students' personal beliefs to improve the learning experience in regards to student views of intelligence.

Paris and Winograd (1990) suggested that if students are encouraged to become active participants in the learning process, through the use of metacognition, they will be more mastery oriented and will risk academic failure in pursuit of deeper meaning. This implies that the more a learner understands about how to learn and how the thought process works, the more likely he or she is to enjoy the process of learning. This in turn travels back to motivation and increases the effectiveness of the learning process.

Beliefs about intelligence. A learner's theory of intelligence (entity, incremental or combined) impacts help-seeking behaviors, as well as achievement goal orientation and motivation (Shih, 2008). There are three views of intelligence that individuals can hold simply from their own everyday meaning of the world. The first is an entity view of intelligence: Entity theorists believe they are "stuck with what they've got." Praising children for being smart verses putting forth effort is known to promote this type of epistemological belief (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). The second is an incremental view of knowledge in which one believes that "what you know is continually built upon." The third is a combination view of knowledge as something that is partially fixed, but somewhat changeable. Why does it matter how students think about their intelligence? One reason has to do with Attribution Theory, as described by Weiner (2000), who proposed that the two main determinants of motivation, expectancy (the subjective

likelihood of future success) and value (the emotional consequence of attaining a goal or failing to attain a goal), are influenced by causal attributions.

Attribution Theory posits three underlying causal properties affect the expectancy and value placed on a given situation: first is the locus, or the location of the cause as something internal or external to the individual, second is stability and refers to the nature of the cause as constant or temporary, and third is controllability (Weiner, 2000). To put these factors in terms of intelligence, if a student thinks he or she isn't "smart," and believes there is no chance of becoming smart, he or she is not going to try to become smart. The good news is, a recent article suggests changing students' beliefs about intelligence may take only an hour.

In this study by Blackwell, Trzesniewski and Dweck (2007), middle school students were placed into one of two instructional programs, either a study skills program or one that combined study tips with teaching a single idea: the brain is a muscle and giving it a harder workout makes you smarter. In a single semester, Blackwell et al. (2007) reversed the students' long trend of decreasing math grades. Children enrolled in the brain-based program improved their math grades and those in the study skills program did not improve (Blackwell et al., 2007). The teachers not having been told which students had been assigned to which workshop, could identify after the fact the students who had been taught that intelligence can be developed. These students improved their study habits and grades, and these results were achieved in only two lessons and in a total of 50 minutes.

Attributions for success and failure. Another type of attribution known to impact academic performance and active help seeking in the classroom deals with attributions for success and failure in learning. Interventions geared towards changing student's attribution styles in the past have relied on the use of persuasion techniques, modeling, operant reinforcement, or simply providing information to teach students to attribute failures to lack of effort and other unstable, internal, controllable factors to improve persistence and performance in academic tasks (Tolan & Boyle, 2008).

In 2008, Tolan and Boyle tested the use of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) as an intervention for retraining children's attributions for success and failures in learning. In their study, 29 children ranging from 10-12years old took part in an intervention. The researchers reported that the choice to include only children over 9 years old was due to Nichols' 1978 finding that the ability to distinguish between the two explanations of effort and ability, as they pertain to attainment, occurs around the age of nine. 21of these children had learning difficulties and low self-esteem, six children with poor self-esteem and no learning difficulties, and two students with specific learning difficulties in spelling and poor self-esteem, took part in an intervention that used role-play, modeling, worksheets and discussion of the link between thoughts, feelings, and actions.

The students, in groups of five learned how changing their thoughts could change their feelings and their actions. They practiced changing negative thoughts about themselves with positive ones, and the students where then were encouraged to recognize the positive feelings they experienced as a result. The researchers then pointed out to

students the connection between positive thinking and increased effort in learning. With feelings of success after increased effort, students were helped to see feelings as something they were responsible for, and this promoted students' feelings of autonomy over their learning environment which improved motivation and led to continued persistence in tasks (Tolan & Boyle, 2008).

The results of Tolan & Boyle's (2008) CBT intervention found that students with learning difficulties showed significant progress, based on pre and post-test scores, in reading, but not spelling. This difference is presumed by the researchers to come from the fact that a child can pick up a book at any time if motivated to do so, while spelling is more related to in-class work. The small number of participants in this study allowed for statistical analysis only for the 21 children with learning difficulties and low self-esteem. Although weak in quantitative results, 100% of the students reported improved self confidence, 93% stated an increase in positive feelings about their self, 96% reported enjoyment in taking part in the program, and 96% felt they had enhanced their motivation. About 80% of the students also reported they had observed progress in their reading and spelling skills, and 96% of students who changed their attributions for success and learning increased their motivation in the classroom.

Student Motivation, Emotions and Thoughts

The previous studies all addressed student motivation by the way of how students think about their learning experience. Thoughts lead to emotions, and our emotions motivate us to seek out information that is relevant to goal directed thoughts. The following section is divided into four subsection: 1) intrinsic motivation and its role in

promoting student success and enjoyment in learning, 2) how emotion affects learning for academic material, 3) results from research on emotional and social education programs, and 4) student perceptions of teacher practice.

Intrinsic motivation to learn and achieve. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) contended that because motivation is a malleable trait, educators are able to change their instruction and classroom climate to change the motivation of their students. The U.S. Department of Education (2003) reports that quality resources and student motivational incentives are associated with increases in student academic engagement. According to the Learning First Alliance (2001), "Students are most motivated to learn, feel the greatest sense of accomplishment, [and] achieve at the highest levels when they are able to succeed at tasks that spark their interests and stretch their capacities. To be meaningful, learning must effectively connect to students' questions, concerns, and personal experiences, thereby capturing their intrinsic motivation and making the value of what they learn readily apparent to them" (p. 4).

Educators want students to be intrinsically motivated because this type of motivation produces quality learning experiences, increased creativity and high levels of performance in tasks, and is known as positively correlated with academic achievement, standardized test scores, and grade point average (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The promise of extrinsically motivating rewards in exchange for behavior is often a simple and effective short-term solution used in classrooms to motivate students to "get to work." Unfortunately, this quick fix may undermine intrinsic motivation. In fact, according to Deci & Ryan (1999) a meta-analysis confirms that virtually every type of reward

promised to be given contingent upon task performance undermines intrinsic motivation. This is not just tangible rewards, but threats (e.g., Deci & Cascio, 1972), deadlines (e.g., Amabile, DeJong & Leeper, 1976), directives (e.g., Koestner, Ryan, Bernieri & Holt, 1987), and competition pressure (e.g., Reev & Deci, 1996). However, the social nature of learning allows teachers to be able to adjust their instructional practices and the classroom climate to improve students' intrinsic motivation (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002).

Self Determination Theory offers an approach teachers can use to enhance intrinsic motivation by meeting the three basic human needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. *Autonomy*, according to Brown and Goldstein (2007), is a sense of "choicefulness" in pursuing one's goals, and a feeling of ownership over them as one's own; *relatedness* refers to our need to feel close connections with others; and *competence* is the need to feel capable and efficacious. This theory relies mainly on the benefits of autonomy and its ability to promote intrinsic motivation, which improves feelings of wellbeing (Brown & Goldstein, 2007). The authors contend "feelings of autonomy are particularly strong when the task is perceived as being closely connected to the values, interests, and goals that constitute the core of one's authentic self and identity" (p.432).

According to Deci & Ryan (2000), in Self Determination Theory, extrinsic motivation is not simply one contrast to intrinsic motivation but exists on a continuum. The researchers contend that when extrinsic motivation is more autonomously determined, many positive outcomes have been identified: higher levels of engagement (e.g., Connell & Wellborn, 1990), improved performance (e.g., Miseranding, 1996),

lower dropout rates (e.g., Vallerand & Bisonenette, 1992), higher quality of learning (e.g., Grolnick & Ryan, 1987), and higher psychological well being (e.g., Sheldon & Kasser, 1995). And these results have been found across cultures (Hayamizu, 1997).

Promoting student autonomy in the classroom is a rather general strategy teachers can use to improve student wellbeing and academic learning. Teachers can promote autonomy in the classroom by providing freedom and choice and by drawing on student interests in classroom instruction (Sanacore, 2008). When autonomy is fostered in the classroom, students are more likely to have higher levels of engagement, productivity, achievement, self-competence, and intrinsic motivation (Sanacore, 2008).

Deci and Ryan (2000) contended motivating students to value activities that are not intrinsically motivating in and of themselves can be achieved through "internalization and integration of values and behavioral regulation." The researchers explain that internalization is an active process describing the transformation of an extrinsic motive into a personally endorsed value. The levels of extrinsic motivation lie on a continuum based on the degree of control exerted by external factors. This continuum ranges from passive compliance of the extrinsic motive to active personal commitment associated with perceived internal control. As feelings of autonomy regarding the extrinsic motive increase, so does the progression towards the motive transforming into something intrinsically valued by the individual. This move towards increased internalization of extrinsic motives is associated with personal commitment thought to involve positive perceptions of self, higher levels of persistence and increased quality of engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

According to Deci and Ryan (2000), increased internalization is said to involve positive perceptions of self and higher levels of persistence and quality of engagement. The researchers explained that when one has internalized something to the degree that little conflict exists in connection with the internalized value, more personal resources are accessible and greater behavioral effectiveness is achieved along with improved experiences of well being (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

External prompting is necessary to initiate an extrinsically motivated behavior. Deci and Ryan (2000) contended that the reason people engage in a particular behavior when prompted is because others, with whom they want to feel a sense of relatedness, value the behavior. “In classrooms this means that students feeling respected and cared for by their teacher is essential for their willingness to accept the proffered classroom values” (p. 64). The researchers explained that this idea is also supported by Ryan, Shiller and Lynch (1994), who showed greater internalization of behavioral regulations in school was correlated with feelings of relatedness to teachers.

A promising implication of the findings discussed is that teachers may be able to facilitate students’ adoption of learning as something of intrinsic value that is motivating in and of itself. Motivational states are linked to learning and memory (Woike, Bender & Besner, 2009), and all of these are influenced by emotion, leading to the next section, a discussion on the role of emotions in learning.

Emotions. Academic emotions have been shown to influence intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, cognitive resources, and self-regulation (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz & Perry, 2002) as well as goal orientation (Linnenbrink, 2005). There is strong correlation

between academic emotions and the way students learn, perceive their learning experience, and perceive their academic achievement (Do & Schallert, 2004). How emotions affect student memory was the question taken on by researchers in the following example of recent research involving examination of socioemotional components known to effect academic achievement. Levine, Rice, and Pizzaro (2007) focus on the topic of emotional disengagement and memory for academic material, but the authors explained a great deal in terms of how emotions affect student learning in a more general sense.

Levine, Rice, and Pizzaro (2007) argued that emotional disengagement, while having many negative effects associated with its processes, does not have always to drain cognitive resources. They noted that many sources provide evidence that reappraisal and distraction are both techniques that can be used to decrease effectively the intensity of negative emotions. Research has show the effects of disengagement strategies when new emotional information is presented as distracting and maladaptive (fragment: in painful memory of emotional material) but research into the effects of emotional disengagement for non emotional material was not investigated until Levine et al. (2007) who noted:

To the extent that people are able to use such strategies successfully to limit the attention allocated to emotional information memory for non-emotional information may benefit. In summary, because people may emotionally disengage by turning attention away from emotion eliciting events and toward information in the environment, attempts to inhibit emotion may actually promote memory for non-emotional information. In contrast, emotional engagement involves focusing on emotions and their causes, poses

the greater immediate threat to memory for non-emotional material (Levine et al., 2007, p. 814).

The positive effects of emotional disengagement for memory of non emotional information was validated through a study involving 200 children divided into two groups. Children were randomly assigned to four experimental conditions: a neutral film with no regulation instructions, a sad film with no regulation instructions, a sad film and emotional engagement instructions, or a sad film and emotional disengagement instructions. Children were interviewed individually in all four conditions.

In the emotional disengagement situation, children were instructed not to feel or show any signs of sadness and then asked questions about an emotionally neutral part of the film. The group instructed to regulate their emotions received similar instructions but where the other group was told to forget about any sad feelings, this group was instructed to do the opposite. "If you feel sad, I want you to think about your sad feelings while you answer the questions. It's okay if you feel sad now, and it's okay to let yourself make a sad face. How did the boy in the film feel? Why did the boy feel that way? What could the boy do to make himself feel better? When you watched the boy crying, how did you feel? Why did you feel that way? What can you do to make yourself feel better?" (p. 815). Children given no regulation instructions received instructions similar to the disengagement group but without the mention of emotions.

Following all four conditions, an educational film was showed and memory tasks were administered to the students. The results showed that feelings of sadness do interfere with memory for educational material. Children who viewed the sad film had

lower levels of accurate recall for educational material presented after the sad film than those in the neutral film condition. The finding that sad children were less able to remember educational material is consistent with previous research and highlights the importance of teaching effective emotional regulation in the classroom.

Levine and colleagues (2007) were also concerned with the emotional regulation strategies employed by the children before any type of emotional instruction was administered. This was measured by self reports given at the end of the experiment. The reported strategies were coded as "cognitive engagement" if reappraisal of the film content was used or general statements about ways of thinking of the film (e.g., I thought that sick horse would eventually get better; I thought about the movie and then wasn't so sad). "Cognitive disengagement" was coded if the importance of the film was re-evaluated or if the child used distraction techniques. "Behavioral" strategies were those which described repressing or changing facial expression, looking away, or just watching the film. "No strategy" was coded for those who reported they did not do anything or they did not know what they did.

The results of the analysis revealed differences in strategies used by different age groups but not by experimental condition. Older children were more likely to use reappraisal of the outcome, and importance of the sad film, than younger children, who were more likely to use distraction techniques, or no strategy than any other methods. The relation between self reported regulation strategies and memory for the educational material presented in the 2nd film was determined using separate hierarchal regression analyses on students' free and cued recalled scores. This included self reported regulation

strategies and experimental group as predictors. Analyses found a positive correlation between age and both free and cued recall performance; using a cognitive disengagement strategy was found to be associated with better cued and free recall of educational material in comparison to the use of behavioral or not strategy. Cognitive strategies were used more than behavioral for both age groups.

The findings of this study contribute to the current body of research relevant to understanding how emotions affect the learning process in the classroom. The students who became sad upon seeing a sad film had less ability to recall subsequent educational material presented. The authors contended that this was not an unexpected outcome and is consistent with past research (e.g., Frijda, 1987; Lerner & Keltner 2000; Levine & Pizarro, 2004) and supports finding that experiencing aversive emotions within the classroom environment is negatively correlated with academic performance.

One major contribution of Levine and colleagues (2007) study to the field of emotional regulation and memory is the discovery that although emotional disengagement is associated with poorer memory for emotional information and events, this strategy can enhance memory for emotionally neutral events. The practical use of this information is enhanced by the sequence of events the researchers used: emotion elicitation, emotional regulation, encoding. This sequence is a common one in real life situations. In a school environment children often are in need of emotional regulation proceeding events followed by demands for attention (i.e. a student is sad about something that happened on the playground and has to return to class for a history lesson).

Important is the suggestion that when given instruction to disengage from emotional material, children have the ability to use cognitive strategies to follow these instructions, enhancing memory for educational material (Levine, et al., 2007). The higher reported use of cognitive strategies by participants is highly relevant when considering other implications of this research. Further investigation is needed to identify specific effects of various cognitive strategies and behavioral strategies. The authors explained that these findings go against a large body of research regarding the negative effects of suppression, which is believed to drain resources away from regulatory abilities relevant to performance on subsequent cognitive tasks.

The next step according to Levine and colleagues (2007) is to investigate specific disengagement strategies and their effects on memory so teachers can effectively instruct their students in the process when appropriate. As discussed, emotional disengagement is associated with many negative psychological outcomes, particularly if an individual student perceives a general threat to their wellbeing (e.g. Carver and Scheier, 1999).

Levine et al. (2007) referred to the numerous findings of other researchers demonstrating the positive association between enrollment in emotional education programs and increases in academic performance, pointing the need for the use of emotional engagement strategies. The authors contend that the findings that such programs have positive effects on classroom behavior are not surprising considering that overall positive social functioning and mental health are correlated with children's emotional regulation skills (e.g. Cole, Zahn-Waxler, Fox, Usher and Welsh, 1996; Eisenberg et al. 1995).

Learning to express one's emotions properly is associated with promoting a desire towards mastery over events and emotional reactions to those events (Levine et al., 2007). The research conducted by Levine et al. (2007) has supplied new information that may be helpful to the development of social and emotional learning programs by providing evidence that different emotional regulation strategies are identified as having different outcomes for different sets of circumstances. The authors contended that their finding that emotional engagement did not improve memory may show that the effects of emotional engagement in the classroom setting are indirect. "Emotional engagement may foster general socioemotional development that, in turn, facilitates social relationships and a classroom environment conductive to learning" (Levine et al., 2007, p.821).

Learning to express as well as regulate one's emotions in a healthy manner are critical life skills, without which, optimal learning cannot occur. Many approaches to improving education involve the idea of promoting healthy emotional literacy. Additionally, emotions directly impact the social interactions we have with others. For these reasons and many others, there is a lot of recent discussion regarding programs such as those suggested by Tolan and Doyle (2005) and Levine et al. (2007); universal interventions promoting positive student development through emotional and social education.

Social and Emotional Education

Social and emotional learning (SEL), as defined by The Center for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is “the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive achievement goals, appreciate

the perspectives of others, and establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively" (n.p.). An increasing amount of research and literature supports the principle that successful implementation of SEL programs is a key component of school success (Kristjansson, 2007). Kristjansson (2007) explained that educating children about qualities associated with strong "character" is nothing new as character education was a part of the mission of public schools until the 1950s (when it was phased out because of concerns that teaching morality would be associated with teaching religion) (Kristjansson, 2007).

The term "Emotional Intelligence" (EI) is closely linked with the SEL movement. Kristjansson (2007) explained the term was first coined by Salovey and Mazer (1990) and was defined as "the capacity to process emotional information accurately and efficiently including the capacity to perceive, assimilate, understand and manage emotions" (p. 41). According to Salovey and Mazer (1990), emotionally intelligent individuals are: self aware and able to recognize their emotions; able to manage their emotions (i.e., they are able to self soothe and shake off negative emotions); motivated to engage in emotional self control; empathetic and able to recognize emotions in others; and good at handling relationships using social competence and an ability to manage emotions in others (Salovey & Mazer, 1990 as cited in Kristjansoon, 2007, p. 41). However, according to Kristjansoon (2007) it is Goleman's (1996) work that is the most cited EI work in SEL literature. Goleman (1996) claimed he is taking on Aristotle's challenge to "manage our emotional life with intelligence" (as cited in Kristjansoon, 2007).

Kristjansoon (2007) credited the popularization of emotional intelligence as bringing the focus of the educational significance of emotions back on the public school radar, but explaineded that merely teaching the virtues of emotional intelligence is not the answer. Kristjansoon (2007) argued that EI is not empirically testable and is nothing more than an emphasis on anything involving positive emotion, motivation, or good character. Teaching emotional intelligence in the classroom may not be the answer to addressing the emotional literacy of students. Kristjansson (2007) contended, "there is a growing consensus among educators, most vocal in the U.S., that children's emotional literacy should be promoted in schools. Social and emotional learning is then seen as the missing piece" (p. 47).

Kristjansson (2007) argued that Social and Emotional Learning complements character education by adding many of the components of Emotional Intelligence, "thus evidently raising the Aristotelian point that virtue is about emotion as well as action: that in order to be fully virtuous, a person must not only act, but also react, in the right way, towards the right people at the right time" (p. 40). However, Kristjansoon (2007) remained skeptical as to the value of using emotional intelligence research to enhance the development of social and emotional learning programs, and he urges advocates of SEL to look to Aristotle, not Goleman. The researcher noted that Aristotelian ideals should be incorporated into educational framework through emotional cultivation of the young (Kristjansoon, 2007).

Addressing relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors is the focal point of many programs designed to promote positive child and youth development and

achievement. A recent meta-analysis adds to the existing body of evidence that when schools address the socioemotional aspects of learning, they improve students' overall state of wellbeing and academic achievement.

In December of 2007, The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) released the findings of a meta-analysis of 207 studies of social and emotional learning (SEL) programs (Weissberg & Durlak, 2007). Over five years, CASEL analyzed over 700 SEL programs that endorse positive youth development in home, school, and community settings and involved 288,000 students between the ages of 5 and 18 from rural, suburban, and urban areas. The meta analysis included programs that were administered during a typical school day to children in the general school population. A control group was present in all cases involved in this analysis. Data were collected was measured in terms of at least one of six outcomes related to students' (1) social and emotional skills, (2) attitudes toward self and others, (3) positive social behaviors, (4) conduct problems, (5) emotional distress, and (6) academic performance.

Three types of school based programs were included in the meta-analysis: classroom programs administered by teachers, classroom programs run by researchers, and multi-component programs. Teacher run programs usually consisted of lesson plans that were delivered in the classroom only and involved specific curriculum. Researchers also performed the same type of lessons as teachers in some studies. In the third identified type of school based SEL programs, multi-component programs included classroom instruction in social and emotional learning as well as additional components

such as parent involvement or school wide re-structuring to encourage and support positive development.

The findings of this study showed that students were positively affected by participating in social and emotional learning programs that met the above described criteria in multiple ways. Students showed improved skills, attitudes, and positive social behaviors at the end of SEL interventions, as well as demonstrating lower levels of emotional distress and conduct problems. A key finding of this study is that although time was taken away from academics to implement SEL lesson plans, scores on standardized achievement tests were on average 11 points higher than students in control groups. Program implementation was shown to have a strong effect on the outcome of SEL interventions and well-executed implementation is extremely important.

The authors of this study discussed the problem of implementation, and they contended that the multiple benefits students can receive from SEL programming are reduced if non-research based SEL programs are used or if programs are not implemented successfully and to facilitate the best possible outcomes. They argued that school staff should be supported by professional development, coordinated state and educational policies, and quality leadership to oversee implementation of SEL programs. If this is accomplished, the researchers claim such programs will foster social, emotional and academic growth of students. When implementation problems were reported, positive outcomes were only found in the areas of improved attitudes and lower reported conduct problems. The teacher, and not researchers' implementation of programs was shown to make the most significant gains in academic achievement. Forming close teacher student

relationships was shown to improve student learning, with communication as key to forming any solid relationships.

Student perceptions of teacher practices. McCombs, Daniels, & Perry, (2008) presented a study of learner perceptions of teacher practice involving 2,009 children in grades K-3, and 124 teachers who completed surveys regarding perceptions of teacher practices as being "learner-centered." The teacher practices evaluated were those that encouraged positive interpersonal relationships, provided motivational support, and enhanced academic learning, as these three domains of instruction are known to be important factors involved in student motivation and learning.

The student survey had two parts. Part 1 assessed students' perceptions in three domains of teacher practice as discussed above: 1) creates positive interpersonal relationships/climate, 2) provides motivational supports for learning, and 3) facilitates thinking and learning. The second part addressed students' motivation from the perspective of perceived competence and interest in school. The teachers were surveyed to measure perceptions in the same three domains of teacher practice as the students. Teachers' learner and non-learned centered beliefs were also measured.

Results revealed that student motivation was positively correlated with student perceptions of the frequency with which teachers engaged in learner-centered practices. Perceptions of learner-centered practices were revealed to have more of an effect on motivation than teacher variables. Teachers' learner-centered beliefs were revealed as positively correlated with student reports of having a good relationship with his or her teacher and students' perceptions of competence. Teachers' non-learner-centered beliefs

were reported as negatively correlated with student motivation and student reported teacher support. Students' perceptions of teacher practices on self-beliefs impacted students perceptions of overall ability, perceived competence with classroom tasks, and perceived competence in reading, math, and art. Students' perceptions of learner-centered practices were found to be predictive of students' liking of school and academic subjects. Teachers' perceptions of their classroom practices were not found to be predictive of students' competence beliefs.

McCombs and colleagues (2008) found students' perceptions of motivation support and teacher-student relationships as caring contributed to children's interests and perceived competence in grades K-3. The authors contended that the findings of this study are supported by past research demonstrating that young students are a reliable source of information when investigating practices that positively contribute student motivation and learning (eg. Perry et al, 2007, Weinstein, 1998) No gender differences were found.

Of the four grades participating in this study, 3rd graders perceived the lowest level of learner-centered practices. According to McCombs et al. (2008), this finding mirrors a trend of declining levels of motivation and self perceived competence around the 3rd grade level. This decline has been attributed to students' improved ability to judge accurately their abilities and environment as well as the decrease in learner-centered practices that often accompanies more stringent academic demands. McCombs et al. (2008) explained that in 2005, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD] Early Childcare Research Network confirmed the current 3rd

grade dilemma. McCombs et al. (2008) described that through observational studies of nearly 800 3rd grade classroom NICHD reported findings of low quality instruction focused on memorization and rote learning.

In conclusion, quality teaching and learning requires an interpersonal caring relationship to exist between the student and his or her teacher. As shown in the discussion of student perceptions of teacher practices, when teachers are overly focused on curriculum, (e.g., standardized test preparation), students' perceptions of teachers' non-learner-centered practices were shown to influence student motivation negatively, along with having a negative impact on perceived ability and competence, suggesting poor academic outcomes. As discussed in the literature presented in *Research and Interventions Aimed at Help Seeking*, when socioemotional elements are addressed in the classroom, and teachers take into account what students are thinking and feeling, educators can effectively and positively impact student beliefs in ways found to improve student wellbeing and achievement. The discussion of research on emotion, motivation, and students' perceptions of teacher practices provides information that may be useful in approaching an understanding of some of the elements at work that are involved in the success of many social and emotional educations programs.

Chapter 4:

Socioemotional elements underlie the cognitive processes involved in higher levels of thinking and problems solving. It is essential for students to have positive interpersonal relationships with teachers who actively address known socioemotional aspects of learning. Before discussing implications of this report for theoretical understanding and teacher education, I will provide an illustrative case from my personal experience. One purpose of this illustrative case is to reveal the roots of my interest in this topic, as well as to show the complexity of the intertwined nature of emotions and social relationships in academic settings.

An Illustrative Case

As much as I was learning from my experiences with the teacher I described earlier, my time teaching pre-kindergarten was cut short. Because I was the only teacher in the preschool with any form of special education background (which consisted of only two graduate courses in behavior management), I was pulled into the younger classroom to "deal with the special needs kids." This experience changed my life, career path, and overall philosophy of teaching. This was where I met a Cameron (a pseudonym, of course)

When I went to observe Cameron, I saw a problem that I have seen many times since: as long as he was not disruptive, his teachers allowed him to do whatever he wanted. He did not listen to the story or participate in art projects or social games, and he was not learning much with the exception of new ways to engage in self-stimulation (i.e., hand flapping, rolling on the floor, staring at objects for extended periods of time, etc.)

and how to use emotional outbursts to get his way (i.e., hitting, pushing, screaming, crying). I do not mean to imply that the staff was not caring, but they had not been educated about effective ways to deal with the unusual behaviors Cameron displayed or his potential to learn in the inclusive preschool classroom. If a teacher believes a child is not capable of learning in the school environment, why bother trying to push the child to a higher level of cognitive, social or emotional functioning?

Cameron watched me the first day as I took notes. He was very aware of my presence. As he came closer to me, I asked him if he was wondering what I was writing in my notebook. He crawled into my lap. I told him that I had been watching him to see what we could do to make school more fun for him. He remained silent and continued to lay silently in my arms. I remember wondering how much was going on inside this little head. I was frustrated he could not tell me. Cameron was diagnosed the following week with High Functioning Autism.

Motivated by what I saw working with Cameron, I went to work as a behavioral therapist in a program for children with Autism. There I learned how to implement Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). I was amazed at how easily many unhealthy behaviors could be extinguished and replaced with functional skills. For example, a child who likes the sensory stimulation he or she gets from banging on the wall can be taught to ask for bongos instead, and in doing so, is also taught to recognize and communicate what his or her body needs.

Although I was impressed with the quick results of behavioral therapy, I was also soon frustrated. The rigid data collection that makes Applied Behavior Analysis well

established as an empirically based therapy was troublesome for me as a therapist. Often, the data did not accurately reflect a child's abilities. I felt the numerous parameters required to ensure accurate data collection prevented me from taking advantage of an endless string number of natural learning opportunities. I also had a difficult time accepting what I considered a disregard for the role of relationships and emotions.

I became aware of the extent of the problem of not addressing socioemotional components in ABA therapy while acting as an anonymous school shadow. The child, whom I will call Nathan, had been in ABA therapy since he was a toddler. In many respects, he did appear to have learned to interact with others socially, and upon initially meeting him one would likely not suspect that he had autism. For an entire semester, I pretended to be a third-grade student teacher while taking data on a Nathan's behaviors. His case manager was evaluating his readiness to attend school without a one-on-one aid. Attending school with Nathan quickly led me to recognize how his lack of social and emotional skills affected his life. It was also evident that he was not the only student whose poor peer relationships and emotional coping skills were negatively affecting his or her school experience. Nathan's years of ABA had helped him to develop skills to help him "fit in," but his interactions with others often came off as robotic and unnatural. Nathan was not able to engage in the simple back and forth required of many conversations.

What concerned me most about Nathan (along with other children with whom I worked) was the high level of anxiety he displayed in the classroom. He resisted trying new things, had apparent low self-efficacy in school tasks, poor emotional regulation, and

was often preoccupied with earning extrinsic reinforcers (i.e., video game minutes) instead of completing the task at hand. I believe this is reflective of the techniques used in ABA, techniques that involve the rewarding of correct answers and the use of extrinsic rewards and other techniques known to decrease intrinsic motivation, and promote a performance oriented approach to learning.

Working with children like Nathan and other children with Autism inspired me to seek out information about other forms of therapy and behavior management techniques that were less rigid and not based on only one school of thought. I learned after months of research that the two main ABA alternative therapy techniques stressed what I believed to be missing in my own experiences with ABA. In researching alternatives to ABA I found that the two leading alternatives are both founded on the importance of relationships in learning and the intertwined nature of the emotional, social and cognitive growth of young children.

I have come to learn that I am one of many educators in the field of special education who have left ABA in search of more holistic approaches. I value the exposure I have had to ABA, and find many of the techniques useful in my daily teaching practices (antecedent interventions, addressing the function of behavior, etc.). It also taught me about Positive Behavior Support (PBS) and ways to encourage the behaviors.

What was not working in my experiences in ABA was the outcome of focusing on right versus wrong answers to questions administered in systematic “unbiased” ways. ABA appears similar to the approach of high stakes testing being used in the current

public school system. The focus is on results with little value on the process, and children's socioemotional development suffers.

Cameron left his ABA experience about the same time I did. His parents removed him from the program because they also believed it was failing to address his socioemotional development. Considered relatively un-reachable by his preschool teachers, Cameron is now thriving at a school for kids with Autism. This school is based on a holistic approach to education and includes some ABA techniques, but without the rigid implementation. His parents are an inspiration, and their love and dedication, coupled with the work of speech, occupational, behavioral therapists and teachers, is an example of the power of persistence and faith in progress. My experiences working in special education reinforced my beliefs about the importance of developing close relationships and holding high expectations for all students. In the next sections I will discuss these socioemotional elements of learning in terms of implications for theoretical understanding and teacher education.

Implications for Theoretical Understanding

Based on research and the suggestions of Tolan & Doyle (2005), I have come to conclude that the reasons underlying the effectiveness of interventions aiming to promote positive socioemotional development potentially involve the following factors 1) the curriculum is intrinsically valuable to students 2) the programs encourage metacognition and self-management, and 3) the content of the interventions are emotionally engaging. I will discuss these topics in this order.

The lasting results of social and emotional based programs may be due to what they teach and how they teach it: both foster intrinsic motivation by supporting students' feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The content of these programs is relevant to student life (e.g., what do you do if you are bullied by a peer, how do you feel when a peer is unkind?), and consists of lessons that are valued by the majority of students. This in turn likely enhances student motivation to attend to what is being taught. As these programs teach students the link between thoughts, feelings, and actions, students learn that they are in control of how they react to their emotions. As found by Ryan and Connell (1989), "identified regulation" (such as in the case of the studies presented) is positively correlated with more positive coping skills, as well as a higher degree of enjoyment in school.

Social and emotional based learning programs aim to show students how they can be successful in peer relationships and regulating and expressing their emotions. Additionally, the finding that teacher led interventions are more predictive of gains in academic achievement than those led by researchers unknown to students (Weissberg, R., Durlak, 2007), points to the possibility that relatedness may also be a factor. However, even if programs did not address social skills, the development of improved emotional regulation would likely improve the quality of students' social relationships.

The success of SEL and similar programs may also have to do with the role of metacognition and self-management. Metacognition encourages students to become active participants in learning (Paris & Winograd, 1990). As described by Paris and Winograd (1990), metacognition involves thinking about what one knows of his or her

thought process and the cognitive strategies involved in controlling it and in regulating the process, and contended that this way of thinking "applies to virtually any domain of problem solving in or out of school, and thus provides a rich source of information about learning and development because metacognition helps students interpret and adapt to learning experiences" (Paris & Winograd, 1990, p.18).

Interventions based on addressing the socioemotional elements of learning are also emotionally engaging to students. Vygotsky contended, "no form of behavior is so vigorous as when it is associated with an emotion…no moral sermon educates like a real pain, like a real feeling, and in this sense, the apparatus of the emotions seems like an expressly adapted an subtle tool by means of which behavior many be influenced effortlessly" (Vygotsky as cited in Levykh, 2007, p. 12).

Using emotional material within curriculum is beneficial to student learning in because emotions guide attention and "without attention, information that our senses take in- what we see and hear, feel, smell, and taste- literally does not register in the mind. It may not be stored even briefly in memory…paying attention physically damps down activity in neurons other than those involved in focusing on the target of your attention (Begley, 2007, p. 157).

Socioemotional based programs focus on changing students' relationships to their thoughts in ways that encourage positive feelings. Recent findings suggest when we experience an emotion we create a "circuitry of neural connections by exercising those portions of the brain corresponding to a particular emotion. As the emotion and related thoughts repeat themselves, the brain circuitry associated with that emotion is

strengthened and becomes over time, our default habit" (Long, 2007, p.90). As students learn to think about their thoughts and feelings in ways that promote feelings of wellbeing, they increase the likelihood of thinking that way in the future. The potential role of teachers as effective facilitators of social and emotional education is an area where more research is needed.

Implications for Teacher Education

Teachers are mediating factors in student learning. As discussed in Panofsky (2005), when teachers hold low expectations students', socioemotional and academic achievement suffers. According to Mistry, Benner, Clark, & Chien (2007), poor teacher expectations are associated with disrupting the performance of low-income children. Teachers who think SES predetermines students' achievement are known to feel ineffective when working with low-SES students; and feelings of low teaching efficacy can reduce motivation and perpetuate low student achievement (Mistry et al., 2007).

As discussed in Panofsky (2003), biased beliefs can lead a teacher to assume academic success is not a likely outcome for some learners. This can have lasting negative consequences for students in the form of poor social, emotional, and academic experiences: and for teachers by means of reducing their self-efficacy and motivation, known to impact performance negatively (Lodewyk & Winne, 2005). Expectations influence what a person perceives in a given situation because emotions guide attention (Levenson, 1999). Emotions motivate a person to seek out information that is relevant to goal directed thoughts, and they help individuals coordinate physiological responses and behaviors (Levenson, 1999). When teachers hold low expectations for students, negative

emotional states related to poor feelings of self-efficacy and motivation are likely present. This negatively charged emotional stated may bias teachers' attention towards information relevant to negative expectations, and the more times a negative bias guides attention, the more likely it is that a person's attention will be guided by similar negative biases in the next interaction, because neural connections are strengthened with use (Begley, 2007). Additionally, the behavior that follows negative perception also changes the way the brain processes information in the future. As Harvard's Alvaro Pascual-Leone and colleagues concluded in 2005, " behavior will lead to changes in brain circuitry, just as changes in brain circuitry will lead to behavioral modifications" (Begley, 2007, p. 244).

The problem of low expectations is not exclusive to low income learners, but their situation illustrates the struggle of many students who have characteristics teachers associate with poor school achievement. It is evident that teachers' need to hold positive expectations about students' ability, but merely educating teachers about the importance of holding high expectations would likely not be enough to change teachers' well established beliefs and behaviors. In order to change what a person knows, he or she must come to see previous beliefs as inadequate (Chan, Burtis, & Bereiter, 1997). I believe there is great value in educating teachers about the recent findings that contradict the once strongly held belief that the brain is fixed and unchangeable past a certain point in development.

Given previous understanding of brain development, it is likely that many teachers view students as "hard wired" in ways that can promote or prevent achievement.

However, contrary to what was well accepted in the scientific community as little as ten years ago, the human brain can generate new neurons, reprograms itself and make structural and functional changes throughout our entire life span in response to our experiences and thoughts (Begley, 2007). Even those aspects of intelligence viewed to be the least malleable (i.e., the pattern-detecting and problem-solving capacity) can be improved through daily working memory exercises (Jaeggi, Buschkuehl, Jonides, & Perrig, 2008). Educating teachers about the potential of all students to improve their current level of social, emotional and academic functioning could potentially have the effect of changing teachers' expectations regarding the ability of all students to succeed.

My personal experiences and research have led me to conclude that learning about the social nature of learning in combination with exposure to the capabilities of the human brain can lead to significant and observable improvement in one's teaching abilities and motivation. I believe it is possible that forming healthy relationships with students may mitigate the unconscious effects of biases and tendencies to stereotype. In my own teaching practice, I have seen that when I have an interpersonal relationship with a student, it actively increases the span and depth of my understanding about that student, and in turn, makes it difficult to make superficial judgments regarding student ability.

In addition, I also believe it would benefit the education community to further investigate the idea of actively changing teachers' beliefs about student ability. In light of the presented research showing student beliefs can be altered successfully by changing the way they think about their thoughts, and learning about the connection between

thoughts, feelings and behaviors, research is needed to determine how the use of similar interventions can be implemented at the teacher level.

Conclusion

Teachers have an amazing amount of power and influence over the social and psychological experiences of their students, but teachers must possess the knowledge required to use this power properly. A school shapes the minds of students within its walls and this gives teachers an incredible opportunity to lead students towards certain ways of thinking. Changing a person's relationship to his or her thoughts can have measurable effects on the inner workings of the brain, and this translates to lasting positive differences in mental health and behavior (Begley, 2007). As shown in discussion of previous research we can effectively benefit student wellbeing and academic achievement by addressing the socioemotional components of academic learning while simultaneously addressing the a child's mental health. Additionally, it is possible that if the socioemotional factors known to negatively effect teaching quality were addressed, we could potentially tackle the $7.34 billion problem of high teacher attrition (Barnes, Crowe & Schaefer, 2007), a number that does not include costs associated with recruiting and hiring teachers, losses in productivity, human capital, or the effect high teacher turnover has on students.

Although there is a general agreement that of the current assessment process should be modified, change is often slow coming and when such a modification of our current evaluation system might occur is uncertain. First and foremost, I believe that we must lead by example. In addition, I think the key lies in empowering our nation's

educators. Teachers possess a great deal of influence over the experiences of their students. Teachers are in a position where they could facilitate the shift from prevention of academic failure to promotion of overall excellence. I believe it is imperative that we educate teachers to believe change is possible and to and embrace their influence. In that way they could each do their part and personally reform their teaching practices to facilitate what research shows to be correlated with optimal learning, and healthy cognitive, emotional, psychological and physiological development. It is time to stop relying on a system that is outdated, out of touch, and out of reach for many classroom educators. As an educator, I think if we cannot change the system it is our duty, and responsibility, to change how we behave within the system.

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